

[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[Church Growth](#)
[Directory](#)
[Leadership](#)
[Ministry](#)
[New Church](#)
[News](#)
[TAP/PATHWAYS](#)[Donate](#)

Sunday, 23 Dec 2012

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Southeast Conference FAQ's[Who is the SEC?](#)[Who is the UCC?](#)[How Do I Find a UCC Church?](#)[What Ministries are Available?](#)[Is Training Available?](#)YOU ARE HERE: [HOME](#) ► [NEWS](#)**A Word From Tim Downs - December 2012**

Dear Friends,

I write this letter on the day before Thanksgiving and the beginning of our holiday season. I am deeply aware of the ways in which our pastors and people have been faithful voices across our conference through the years, and I want to begin with a simple "thank you" to all of you for that witness. I have had the occasion recently to offer a paper in which I wrote about our particular and sacred vocation as a different voice for Christ here in the South, and I thought I would share some of that with you.



We, the United Church of Christ, march to the beat of a different drum in the South. It is often a discordant beat, and frankly often a disturbing and unwelcome beat. I had the pleasure of being at a lecture offered by Diana Butler Bass two years ago, and she referenced the work of William McLoughlin in his book *Revivals, Awakenings and Reforms*. She spoke of the three Great Awakenings that have shaped American history, and said that we are now in the midst of a fourth Great Awakening, "a massive, sustained movement of reorientation."

The First Great Awakening dates to the mid-eighteenth century, and is best known to us by the name Jonathan Edwards. He stirred a moribund church with his calls to renewal, calls with which many of us first became acquainted through his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The Second Great Awakening took place in the first part of the nineteenth century with the rise of abolitionism, the movement for women's rights, and prohibition, all of which had the fervor of the First Great Awakening, but now manifested an awareness that God's redemptive activity is greater than the redemption of individual souls, and is also present in acts of justice for the marginalized and disenfranchised. The Third Great Awakening took place at the turn of the twentieth century, and saw the rise of Christian unity, a growing appreciation of pluralism, the growing voice of the labor movement, and pacifism.

The Fourth Great Awakening is unfolding around us. It is characterized by a valuing of religious pluralism and an appreciation of the faiths of others. There is a growing awareness that we live not in nation-states as much as a global community. The environmental movement is evidence of a growing care for the earth. We are showing greater caring for one another, as well, and seeking to build more humane economic systems, unconstrained by the old capitalist and socialist models, both of which have been abusive and cruel in much of their application.

Diana Butler Bass goes on to note the breakdown of traditional values. For those

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Wisconsin UCC reaches elderly members through 35 years of radio broadcasts

With more than half of the congregation unable to attend church every Sunday because of illness, disability or just general old age, the church takes its message to the airwaves to make sure that even its members who can't be present can hear worship service and remain involved.



Grand Father, take good care to note the broadness of traditional values. For those of us living in the Fourth Great Awakening, we saw this in the rise of the civil rights movement and feminism, in the peace movement, and in the environmental movement. While these shifts in societal values were taking place, we also saw “cultural distortions” in reaction to them. We heard disparaging comments about hippies, talk about traditional family values, and mutterings about the erosion of values. All this while disregarding the ways in which values of the past violated women, same gender loving people, and people of color.

A new vision begins to take more distinctive shape, new moral and ethical possibilities begin to emerge, and prophets of this new way begin to get a wider hearing. In more mainstream society, people begin to “get it” – and conflicts become sharper and divisions between the old and new more pronounced. A transformation begins to unfold, and as the “undecideds” note the necessity of the new vision, and the need for the new patterns, institutions begin to shift, and we see political reform and new economic patterns.

There is throughout a pull forward and a push back but also a grand drama is unfolding, and in the midst of this ambiguity I remain deeply grateful for the pioneers and prophets, often lonely voices yet persistent and pressing. We belong to a people represented by the United Church of Christ, and its predecessor denominations who have been at the leading edge of each Great Awakening, from the first to the present. My spiritual forbears have been pioneers and prophets. Names such as Jonathan Edwards, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Reinhold Niebuhr, William Sloane Coffin, Andrew Young -- all of these in each of the awakenings of which they were a part pried open the door a little further to their respective Great Awakening.

We have seen this Fourth Awakening begin to take root in our Conference. The churches that reflect its values of pluralism, welcome, mission, and justice are churches that are thriving spiritually and growing in many ways. On this Thanksgiving eve, again, I give thanks to you for all that you have done and continue to do to give voice and heart to this awakening as it unfolds within us.

Peace,

Timothy C. Downs
Conference Minister

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« < December 2012 > »

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
25	26	27	28	29	30	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

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